



The County Connection

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First 5 comes through for kids

This Holiday Season, First 5 California gave the gift of health to the state's youngest children in the form of a \$16.7 million contribution to help a state agency keep kids off waiting lists for medical coverage.

Executive Director Kris Perry appeared at the Managed Risk Medical Insurance Board (MRMIB) meeting December 17, 2008 to inform the board of the First 5 contribution, which the State Commission approved two days earlier. The board graciously accepted the commitment in order to continue enrolling more than 65,000 infants and children from throughout the state. The monetary contribution includes pledges from county commissions statewide to seek approval from their own local commission to assist with the funding.

"The funding proposal is the result of ongoing discussions with the Governor's office and the legislature on how First 5 can help expand children's access to health coverage," Perry told MRMIB during its board meeting at the Sacramento City Hall Council Chambers.

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First 5 Executive Director Kris Perry discusses the state commission's contribution to MRMIB with reporters as MRMIB Executive Director Lesley Cummings looks on.

The 13 county commissions that have approved the funding proposal include: Contra Costa, Del Norte, Kern, Lake, Los Angeles, Nevada, Sacramento, San Benito, San Diego, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano and Tulare.

Without the infusion of money, MRMIB publicly announced that it would have to close enrollment and enact a waiting list, effectively leaving thousands of children without health insurance coverage.

MRMIB administers the Healthy Families Program (HFP) and provides low-cost health, dental and vision insurance coverage to children from low-income families ineligible for Medi-Cal. In December 2008, HFP faced a \$17.2 million General Fund Deficit. By law, MRMIB is prohibited from incurring a deficiency and is mandated to discontinue health insurance coverage if it does not have the funding capacity.

"We look forward to working with you to ensure thousands of California's youngest children are not denied health coverage during this period of rising unemployment rates and economic

instability," Perry told the board.

The contribution will allow MRMIB to continue enrolling children into the health insurance program through the end of the fiscal year, June 2009.

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Thanks to First 5 California

The *100% Campaign*, a coalition of children's advocates, and several early childhood development organizations sent a heartfelt thank you to First 5 California Executive Director Kris Perry for her extraordinary efforts, organizing the commission and providing the necessary funds to maintain children's health coverage through the Healthy Families Program.

In a warm and sincere letter of gratitude, The Children's Partnership, Children Now, Children's Defense Fund CA, PICO California, United Ways of California and California Children's Health Initiatives, expressed their gratitude for providing bold leadership during this economic crisis.

The letter partially reads, "You have truly stepped forward for children in a very important way. By taking leadership and committing one-time First 5 California funds in a timely way, you averted thousands of children potentially losing their preventive health care....Thanks to you and your colleagues an immediate crisis was averted!"

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***Zero to Three* conference**

Early child development advocates from across the country gathered in Los Angeles December 4, 2008 at the 23rd National Training Institute (NTI) to share ideas and offer new strategies for professionals. *Zero to Three*, an organization dedicated to training and supporting policymakers and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of children from birth to age three, hosted the four-day gathering.

First 5 California managers and staff participated in the conference as facilitators of various workshops, exhibitors and co-hosts of the exclusive NTI pre-institute.

The pre-institute featured First 5 Executive Director Kris Perry and State Commissioner Molly Munger, among various other panelists from Illinois, Ohio, Nebraska and West Virginia.

Perry's discussion focused on building a solid and cohesive early child development structure. "It is important that we build synergy by growing 0 to 5 investments in services," she said.

Her focal point encouraged sharing ideas, developing evidenced-based programs, setting priorities and demanding accountability.

Panelists Michael Burke, Program Director for the *Buffet Early Childhood Fund*; Barbara Gebhard, State Policies Director of *Zero to Three*; Ann Kirwan, National Policy Vice President for *Ounce of Prevention Fund*; and Jacqueline Romer Sensky, President of JRS Group echoed the message of creating synergy for successful program development.

All the panelist discussed setting priorities, capitalizing on opportunities and forging relationships with community leaders and elected officials to move the child development agenda forward.

Burke opened his presentation with a bridge-building metaphor. "We need to work together to build a bridge that spans the gulf between what we know and what we do when it comes to early care and education of very young children," he said. "A golden bridge that reaches across the first five years of life and keeps kids from falling into the student achievement gap."



First 5 California Program Manager Camille Smith, left, shares ideas and strategy with First 5 Monterey Executive Director Francine Rodd at the Zero to Three Conference

The *Zero to Three* conference also featured workshops that discussed new research discoveries for infant emotional portrayals, designing policy for poor children and immigrant children and overcoming obstacles to quality child care.

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Perry meets with Obama-Biden transition team

First 5 Executive Director Kris Perry flew to the nation's capitol December 4, 2008 to share her wisdom and expertise on early childhood development and early education with the Obama-Biden Transition Team.

The transition team invited Perry and other renowned experts from across the country to tap into their knowledge and experience in an effort to help fulfill President-elect Barack Obama's pledge to increase resources for children from birth to age five, a major component of his campaign platform.

The Obama-Biden Zero to Five plan places key emphasis at early care and education for infants and strives to provide critical support to young children and their parents. Similar to First 5 California's vision, the president-elect's early education plan aims to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to succeed. It also includes Early Learning Challenge grants to promote 0 to 5 efforts and help states move toward voluntary

universal preschool. First 5 California's Power of Preschool programs rank among the nation's best.

"I was pleased to be a part of a larger contingency of big thinkers and proven leaders in early child development," Perry told First 5 staff about her visit. "We discussed best practices to ensure access to high-quality programs and expanding child care opportunities so children enter kindergarten ready to learn."

According to First 5 California Chief Deputy Director Diane Levin, First 5 has been in contact with the Obama-Biden team on a number of occasions, providing them with three primary recommendations: Invest in Early Education, Invest in Children's Health Coverage and Promote Program Collaboration and Integration.

First 5 California will be at the forefront of progress for the new administration to strengthen early child development for the nation's most vulnerable population, its children.

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December 2008 legislative update

On December 16 the Senate Budget Sub-Committee on Health and Human Services discussed potential policy changes to close the state's ongoing budget deficit.

First 5 California Executive Director Kris Perry appeared in the hearing to explain the grave and immediate impact on the Republican budget proposal to redirect Proposition 10 funds. She told the committee it would strip away the 2.7 million health and education services that form a critical safety net for California families in need.

Her testimony clarified Proposition 10's goal, reminding legislators that First 5's mission is both to improve health conditions as well as advance educational outcomes for children 0 to 5. She told them, "First 5 is a California success story. We have, in just 10 years, delivered the most stable source of funding for children's health insurance in this state."

Watch [Kris Perry's testimony at the Legislative Budget Hearing](#)

here by clicking on the Senate Committee Budget SubCmte on Health & Human Services, Labor and Veteran Affairs. Her testimony comes at 1 hour and 13 minutes (1:13:00) into the clip.

On December 31 Governor Schwarzenegger released his budget proposal covering the rest of this fiscal year and including the next fiscal year, beginning July 1, 2009. In the plan he proposes shifting Proposition 10 funding to the Department of Social Services, ultimately eliminating the voter-approved First 5 Commission. If the legislature agrees, the proposal would have to go before voters once again for approval.

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First 5 California promotes first anniversary of no smoking in cars with children law

This month marks the one-year anniversary of the California law prohibiting individuals from smoking in cars with children present. First 5 California will increase awareness with an aggressive media campaign highlighting the facts of this law and the benefits of smoking cessation.

The campaign will distribute flyers at media events for Latino, Asian and African American communities. In addition, First 5 California is partnering with Farmers Insurance agency to distribute First 5 branded material to Farmers' large network of insurance agents in the state.

Despite a significant reduction in tobacco use over the past 10 years, smoking rates in specific ethnic communities remain high.

"If you are observed smoking and are cited, it's a \$100 fine," said the author of the law, state Senator Jenny Oropeza (D-Long Beach), in a statement last year.

Pediatricians say children are more susceptible to second-hand smoke because their bodies are still developing. The effects often include asthma, bronchitis and ear infections.

First 5 California Executive Director Kris Perry will also discuss the importance of smoking cessation on her monthly airing of First 5's Top 5 on *KCRA Channel 3/My 58* this month.

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***Power of Preschool* progress report**

First 5 California mailed copies of the 2008 *Power of Preschool (PoP)* Demonstration Program Progress Report to all First 5 county commissions in December. *PoP* is a 5-year demonstration program that provides a "snapshot" of the progress made by participating counties mid-way through their cycle.

The purpose of the report is to inform policy makers, early childhood practitioners and advocates about the preschool experience in the nine participating counties.

The 89-page report describes each participating county's program background, the children served, the type of partners that assisted, local evaluations, unique and innovative characteristics per county and support from local funding resources.

The nine participating counties are Los Angeles, Merced, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Ventura and Yolo.

The report provides an in-depth analysis on key elements to develop quality preschool programming, which includes securing dedicated staff, high teacher quality, reimbursement linkage to teacher quality, the importance of partnerships, collaborations with higher education institutions and serving children with the greatest needs.

The program will next define program recommendations for statewide policy development, conduct further study on the reimbursement of rate structure and seek a sustainable statewide funding source.

The entire report can be found on the First 5 California Web site under "[Publications.](#)"

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Project Legacy update

The *Project Legacy* development is in full swing. The Program Management Team and Research and Evaluation division began the nomination process, last month, for early childhood development experts and organizations to serve on First 5 California's *Project Legacy* Workgroup. The workgroup selection will be completed later this month.

Workgroup members will adopt criteria to improve and select the most effective First 5 programs to serve as signature programs and pilot projects poised to move First 5 California onto its "Roadmap to the Future."

"The plan is to strategically develop the most important programs so that we are using our resources to make the biggest and the most beneficial impact on California's children," said First 5 Research Program Specialist Tina Fitzgerald.

Completing 10 years of successful service programming to California's neediest children, First 5 California's *Project Legacy* will strengthen the commission's efforts and improve on its high quality service delivery.

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Asian-language Kit for New Parents to debut in LA

First 5 California's newest version of the highly praised *Kit for New Parents* makes its official debut January 14 at the California Endowment Center for Healthy Communities in Los Angeles. The first-ever Asian-language versions of the *Kit* will include Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese.

First 5 California Executive Director Kris Perry will introduce the *Kits* to the Asian-Pacific Islander American community at the January 14 media event. Her presentation includes a five-minute highlight reel of the Asian-language *Kit for New Parents* DVD.



Parents can refer to the *Kit for New Parents* for parenting advice and tips on topics such as prenatal care, nutrition, discipline and finding quality child care. It provides practical information in an easy-to-use manner to help build parents' confidence as they undertake their new role.

A study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in 2007 found that mothers who used the English or Spanish-language *Kit* demonstrated improved parenting skills. According to the study, 94 percent of these mothers said the *Kit* was a helpful resource that provided important health and parenting information. Mothers who used the *Kit* were more likely to read to their infants, enroll their children in consistent medical care, and take additional steps to childproof their homes.

County commission *Kit* coordinators can place orders for the new *Kits* the same way they order English and Spanish-language versions through the *Kit* vendor Web site.

To order individual *Kits* parents and families may call (800) KIDS-025 (543-7025) for English assistance, 800-50-NINOS (800-506-4667) for Spanish, (800) 597-9366 for Mandarin or Cantonese assistance, (800) 597-9511 for Korean assistance, and (800) 597-9855 for Vietnamese assistance.

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2009 First 5 California state commission meeting schedule

The First 5 California Commission will convene its first meeting of the year January 28 at the Holiday Inn Capitol Plaza, in downtown Sacramento. The meeting is scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The next two Commission meetings are scheduled for April 29 and July 15 at the Holiday Inn in Sacramento. The final commission meeting of the year will take place in Los Angeles, October 21. We will announce the location in the *County Connection* as soon as it is determined.

The First 5 California Commission meetings are open to the public.

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Preparing for the First 5 California 10th Annual Statewide Conference

Education activist and best-selling author Johnathan Kozol and Buffet Childhood Fund Vice President Jessie Rasmussen are the keynote speakers at the 10th Annual First 5 California Statewide Conference.

The conference will be held at the Hyatt Embarcadero Hotel in San Francisco April 14-16.

First 5 California staff are well under way in planning and preparing for a highly-successful conference for early child development professionals.

The conference will feature a pre-conference institute and seven conference tracks to cover a variety of issues in the areas of school readiness, quality healthcare, communication strategies, family support and early learning workforce development.

Please visit the First 5 California Web site at www.ccfc.ca.gov for registration material, hotel and conference reservation forms and any other additional information on the 2009 First 5 California Annual Statewide Conference.

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